Aging Infrastructure

When the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) assessed infrastructure vital to our economic survival and quality of life, navigable waterways was graded "D+". The "2001 Report Card for America's Infrastructure" also assessed America's roads, bridges, transit systems, aviation, schools, drinking water, wastewater, dams, solid waste, hazardous waste, and energy. America's infrastructure received an overall "D+," an unacceptable improvement over the "D" ASCE issued on its last report card in 1998. The reasons for this grade are many, but basically they boil down to demands on the infrastructure increasing faster than budgets for maintenance and new investment.

Navigable channels provide efficient corridors for moving 2.3 billion tons of the Nation's domestic and foreign commerce, and this tonnage is expected to more than double by 2020. Much of our navigable waterway infrastructure is aging, and is not designed for modern vessels. Serious performance problems are likely if current levels of investment continue. This aging infrastructure is a significant contributor to the Corps of Engineers inventory of unfunded work.

As stewards of our America's complex, diverse and widespread water resources infrastructure the Army Corps of Engineers is striving to preserve the Nation's investment and ensure the continued flow of intended benefits - in essence, trying to raise the grade on the Infrastructure Report Card.

Corps of Engineers Backlog

What is meant by the term "backlog" in this case?

When Congressionally authorized projects, whether in a planning, design, construction or operations phase, are annually funded at less than an optimal pace, the result is a backlog of deferred work that allows projects to deteriorate, increases costs and delays benefits from projects.

The Corps of Engineers categorizes its backlog into two distinct groups, construction, and operations and maintenance (O&M).

The construction backlog is the amount it would take to complete construction of all projects currently Congressionally authorized. By Fiscal Year 2003, the construction backlog amount will be about $50 billion. Included in this figure is $6 billion for authorized projects that either lack support by a non-Federal sponsor willing to share project costs, have doubtful economic justification, or no longer meet current needs and are unlikely to be built. That leaves an active construction backlog - projects economically justified and supported by non-Federal sponsors - of $44 billion out of the $50 billion previously identified.

The O&M backlog is the shortage of funding required to perform critical maintenance of government owned and operated facilities such as hydropower plants, navigation locks and dams, and dams for flood control, water supply and recreation. With an FY03 budget to operate and maintain our existing projects of $1.979 billion, a substantial sum, we will still have a backlog of $884 million in critical maintenance deferred from prior years. In addition to this, the Corps has identified over $1 billion in unfunded work that needs to be addressed, but is not as time-sensitive.

Why is backlog important?

A growing backlog means that project completions are delayed, resulting in increased costs, lost benefits, increased maintenance costs, accelerated deterioration of facilities, and reduced services to our Nation.